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Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Celebrates Successful Annual Conference Focused on Connecting Nature, Community, and Equity



Shannon Reiter, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Executive Director, and Judy Schwank, PA State Senator present the KPB Community Pride Award to Bethany Ayers, Keep Reading Beautiful Lead and Sustainability Manager for the City of Reading Public Works.

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful (KPB) proudly announces the resounding success of its Annual Conference held last week in Reading, PA, drawing environmental leaders, volunteers, educators, and policymakers from across the Commonwealth.

The two-day event, themed “connecting nature, community, and equity,” featured workshops and community engagement sessions focused on innovative strategies for litter prevention, community revitalization, urban greening, environmental justice, local resilience planning, and more!

“The 2026 Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Annual Conference demonstrated the power of bringing people together around a shared vision for stronger, healthier communities. Our theme, Connecting Nature, Community, and Equity, came to life through engaging discussions, innovative ideas, meaningful partnerships, and inspiring examples of local action from across the Commonwealth. We are grateful to Keep Reading Beautiful for serving as an outstanding host and to the speakers, sponsors, volunteers, and attendees who contributed their time, expertise, and passion. The conversations and connections made over these two days will help advance cleaner, greener, and more resilient communities throughout Pennsylvania. Together, we are building momentum for lasting positive change that benefits all Pennsylvanians,” said Shannon Reiter, Executive Director, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. Highlights from the conference included:

- **Reading Art and Culture Walk** - Participants learned about the importance of urban art in the community and were introduced to ongoing programs and initiatives.
- **Inspiring Keynote: A keynote address by Keith Green, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS)**, showcased how PHS collaborates with communities and partners to transform public spaces, expand access to green spaces, and empower residents with the tools and resources needed to care for the places they call home.
- **Youth Engagement:** Two enthusiastic Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Young Ambassadors representing Delaware and York counties brought fresh perspectives and energy to the event. These emerging students offered their perspectives on how organizations, municipalities, and community groups can better engage and empower the next generation of environmental stewards.
- **Affiliate Innovation – Shark Tank Style** hosted by PA Department of Environmental Protection Secretary, Jessica Shirley: Three KPB affiliates showcased their most innovative and impactful community improvement ideas in a Shark Tank-style competition. Keep Reading Beautiful took home the \$2,500 grant to help bring their visionary project to life. The Black Walnut Legacy Initiative is a multi-phase heritage and sustainability project centered on the preservation and replanting of Mount Vernon’s historic black walnut trees. The initiative combines environmental restoration, community education, and long-term stewardship planning to honor the legacy of these trees while promoting ecological resilience across Reading, PA.
- **Presentation of the Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Community Pride Award** was presented to Bethany Ayers by PA State Senator, Judy Schwank. Bethany, Keep Reading Beautiful Lead and Sustainability Manager for the City of Reading Public Works was honored for her dedication to environmental stewardship through education, community engagement, and hands-on action.

“Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful extends its gratitude to Keep Reading Beautiful, KPB Board of Directors, PA DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley and all sponsors, speakers, and attendees who made the event possible,” expressed Reiter.

The conference was sponsored in part by the PA Department of Environmental Protection. Other sponsors include Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau, Berks County Community Foundation, Greater Reading Chamber Alliance, Green Building Alliance, and Penske.

For more information about Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful and upcoming initiatives, visit www.keeppabeautiful.org.

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About Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering Pennsylvanians to keep their communities clean and beautiful. Since 1990, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has supported hundreds of thousands of volunteers across the state in their community improvement efforts. Through education, volunteer engagement, and community improvement programs, the organization works to reduce litter, increase recycling, beautify communities, and promote environmental stewardship across the Commonwealth. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful works with many partnering organizations on the state and grassroots level to accomplish the goal of a clean and beautiful Pennsylvania. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful is the state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, Inc., the nation's largest volunteer-based community action and education organization. To learn more about Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, visit www.keeppabeautiful.org.